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SCIENCE.

FRIDAY, JULY 24, 1885.

COMMENT AND CRITICISM.

AMONG THE COLLEGE ASSEMBLIES of this season of the year, the most unique is that of the Convocation of the University of the state of New York. The organization of that body is so peculiar as to be hardly understood in other states, and a word in respect to it may interest our readers. The regents of the university are charged by the state with certain functions which pertain to the control of the academies and high schools of the state, and with a mild oversight of the universities and colleges. Once a year the regents invite the heads of all these institutions, and representatives of the faculties, to assemble in the senate chamber in Albany, and discuss such subjects as may be of special importance to the educational concerns of the state. This is known as the Convocation. Formal papers are read, addresses are made, and deceased teachers are commemorated; but probably the most useful feature of the gathering is the discussion of selected topics by appointed speakers, in the presence of a company of specially interested auditors. For example: at the convocation on the 9th of July, the chancellor of the university left the chair, which was taken by the president of Hamilton university, who introduced the topic of the day, — college discipline. The theme which he opened was discussed by the heads of several other leading institutions in the state. The contrast between such an educational conference and the great conventions of teachers is very marked. The talking is not for the outside public, though anybody may be present who wishes, and the reports in the newspapers are very brief; but the parties interested learn to know one another. They compare their views as experts, and give and take suggestions as to the theory and practice of the work with which they are charged. No

mercantile element is allowed; or, in less euphonious phrase, no book-agents are allowed any privileges in these assemblies.

OUR READERS ARE WELL AWARE that early in June the memorial statue of Charles Darwin, by Boehm, toward the erection of which popular contributions were received from many lands, was unveiled in its permanent site in the great hall of the new natural-history museum of South Kensington. An appropriate address was delivered on that occasion by Professor Huxley, president of the Royal society. We refer to the subject again for the sake of calling attention to one incidental but not unimportant feature in the ceremony, — the presence of men from almost all parties and shades of religious opinion among English protestants. The appearance of the Prince of Wales, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Dean of Westminster, Mr. Beresford Hope, Archdeacon Farrar, not to name any others, is enough to show that the 'establishment' is not unwilling to honor the great naturalist of our age. When the obloquy encountered a few years ago by 'Darwinism' — obloquy not yet entirely dormant in some portions of the United States — is borne in mind, the list of those who assembled on this occasion is as gratifying as the statement that contributions to the memorial were received from fifteen countries, besides the three kingdoms and the British colonies.

AN UNFORTUNATE CONTROVERSY has arisen in the ranks of the medical profession of this country with respect to the meeting of the ninth International medical congress. It is a controversy, however, in which all scientific men among us are interested. Indeed, the good name of American hospitality is involved in its settlement. The International congress, which meets triennially, had determined to meet in Washington in 1887. It is an asso-

ciation of the highest character and dignity, the meetings of which, for many years past, have been attended by the ablest men of the profession. Great benefits, as well as great pleasure, were anticipated from their assembling in this country. The American medical association, having a national name and a national constituency, appointed a select and judicious committee of arrangements; and this committee, having made good progress in their plans, and having secured the promises of co-operation from a large number of the profession, reported what they had done to the American medical association at its recent meeting in New Orleans. The report was received with unexpected disapprobation, in which it is not too much to say that personal and geographical jealousies were apparent. Another committee was appointed, which subsequently met at Chicago, and 'upset' nearly all that had been done so carefully by the first committee. Now, it appears that the first committee, though its work was 'upset,' commands, in fact, much more confidence from the profession than the second. The gentlemen invited by the new committee to co-operate have begun forthwith to make excuse. In Washington, Baltimore, Boston, and Philadelphia, — and perhaps in other places from which we have not heard, — men of the highest professional standing and personal character decline to act with the revolutionary party. Their cards have been made public, and have begun to attract attention from the daily press.

It now looks as if the revolvers would not command the situation. Certainly men of eminence abroad will be slow to accept an invitation to an international congress upon this side of the Atlantic, if a large number of the most eminent physicians and surgeons of this country, widely known professionally as well as personally, have been treated with discourtesy in the preliminary arrangements, and are therefore compelled to stand aloof. It does not look as if the new committee could enlist the general co-operation essential to success, and particularly because their authority

is exercised in what appears to be the spirit of hostile reflection upon measures already initiated, against which no good objection has been made. The only solution of the problem seems to be, for the second committee to acknowledge their inability to form a government, and stand aside, allowing the original committee to go forward and perfect their plans, either in the name of the American medical association or in the name of the profession at large, by some concerted action, which there is time enough to mature. The latter alternative seems to us most likely to be successful.

DURING THE PAST DECADE, Professor Elias Loomis of Yale college has read a series of twenty-one papers, entitled 'Contributions to meteorology,' before the National academy of sciences. The material for these studies has been drawn largely from the publications of the signal-service, and especially from the daily weather-maps, which now present so great an accumulation of observations that extremely accurate conclusions can be drawn from them. The results thus gained, as published in the *American journal of science*, constitute the chief source of generalized knowledge that a student can now consult concerning the behavior of cyclonic storms in this country, on which daily weather-changes depend so largely. The work has been throughout characterized by careful and discriminating methods, and forms as excellent an example of inductive research as can be placed before a student for a model. When put together, the 'contributions' now make a considerable volume, and form a fitting sequel to the early papers on the same subjects, written by Professor Loomis nearly half a century ago.

IN THE RECENT REPORT of the Yale-college observatory, Dr. Waldo complains, and apparently with great justice, that the legislature of Connecticut, at its last session, suddenly terminated its contract with the observatory 'for time-service' to the state at large. He says that this action was taken without a hearing

from the railroad commissioners, the manufacturers of clocks and watches, the mayors or other authorities in the cities of the state, the telephone and telegraph companies, or the observatory. He states that no reason for this action was given except economy; and he claims that the observatory should be at least reimbursed for the considerable expense which it had incurred in preparation for this service. Unless there is some reason for the action of the general assembly not apparent to us, its conduct is certainly most discreditable to a state so intelligent and so wealthy as Connecticut. Nobody can believe that the moderate charge upon the treasury, in return for a service of such universal advantage, can have been burdensome. It is more likely that the action was due to a lack of acquaintance with the points involved, or to the prejudice of some individual. It is remarkable that a state which may almost be called 'the land of the clock-maker' should by its official action throw contempt upon accurate time-keeping. Such 'jerky' legislation is what the state universities of the west are wonted to, but nobody expected it in a matter like this from the land of steady habits. The first of steady habits is fidelity to an engagement, real or implied; and the second is like unto it, — punctuality in all matters where time is an element in the obligation.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

. Correspondents are requested to be as brief as possible. The writer's name is in all cases required as proof of good faith.

Untimely death of a chipping-sparrow.

THE following tragic event occurred in the village of Wake Forest on the 15th of June. The nest was near completion: the lining of hair was being put in. Somehow, in the midst of this process, the sparrow's head became entangled in one end of a long horse-hair, the other end of which had been securely woven into the bottom of the nest. When he rose to go, the half-knot tightened round his neck, and poor chipmy was found dangling some twelve inches below the nest, hung by the neck, and quite dead. I am told that a similar event occurred here a day or two after that stated above. In this case, however, the sparrow was hung by a cotton string, and was found so soon after the mishap, that he was released, having suffered little harm.

W. L. POTEAT.

Wake Forest college, North Carolina.

The Washington monument, and the lightning stroke of June 5.

By one who was near its base, the stroke of lightning which injured the Washington monument is remembered as a ball of fire coming towards him. Does not this observation explain the ball of fire so often reported? An electric spark passing between two points, will, to a circle of observers, present various appearances. If two inches long, it will be seen as a line of fire two inches long by some, while to those in the line of its motion it will be a single spark. So when a flash of lightning (a line of fire) is directed toward the observer, it must appear as a ball of fire, motionless if the movement is directly toward the observer, moving with comparative slowness if slightly off that direction, and with electric rapidity if across the field of view at right angles with the line to the observer's place.

M. C. MEIGS.

Washington, D.C.

Volcanic dust east of the Rocky Mountains.

My attention has recently been called to the interesting letter of Mr. George P. Merrill in *Science* for April 24, on 'Volcanic dust from south-western Nebraska,' and his subsequent paper on the same in the Proceedings of the U. S. national museum, 1885, pp. 99, 100. Since Mr. Merrill seems not to be aware of any earlier published notice of similar volcanic dust found east of the Rocky-Mountain region, a short note may not be amiss here.

In October, 1882, my friend and colleague, Mr. Samuel Garman, placed in my hands for examination a fine gray sand found in Dakota. This, on examination, was seen to be composed of volcanic glass in shards, tubes, etc., mostly water-clear; but a few forms contained glass inclusions and vapor cavities. A few grains were brown, like many of the rhyolitic glasses; many were ribbed, or thicker on one side, thinning down to an edge on the other; others were apparently of uniform thickness; and none gave evidence of being wind or water worn. A very little earthy material was found mixed with the volcanic ash. Mr. Garman gave an account of this deposit of glass before the Boston scientific society, Nov. 8, 1882, and a notice of it was published in the *Boston transcript* for Nov. 10. Attention was further called to this glass in my 'Lithological studies,' published early in November last, on p. 17. Mr. Garman has given me the following information regarding the deposit:—

"It was found about fifty miles south by east from the Black Hills, between the Niobrara and the White rivers, just north of the watershed, not far from the head of Antelope Creek. The bed is horizontal, and, as I remember it, nearly two feet in thickness at its thickest portion, and several rods in extent. The deposits in the immediate neighborhood are late tertiary. A small stream had cut away the bank in which the glass lay, exposing a considerable portion of it. From the exposed edge the powdery material is carried away by the wind as a fine, smoke-like dust. The glass in the bed is as clean as in the sample, except near the upper and lower surfaces, where it is mixed with other matter. To be so clean, it must have been deposited by water almost free from other impurities, for the winds would have mingled other dust with it."

M. E. WADSWORTH.

Museum of comparative zoölogy,
Cambridge, Mass., July 9.